ONE HUNDRED BOOKS

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JOHN COWPER POWYS

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WITH COMMENTARY AND
AN ESSAY ON

BOOKS AND READING

BY

JOHN COWPER POWYS

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PREFACE

This selection of "One hundred best books" is made after a different method and with a different purpose from the selections already in existence. Those apparently are designed to stuff the minds of young persons with an accumulation of "standard learning" calculated to alarm and discourage the boldest. The following list is frankly subjective in its choice; being indeed the selection of one individual, wandering at large and in freedom through these "realms of gold."

The compiler holds the view that in expressing his own predilection, he is also supplying the need of kindred minds; minds that read purely for the pleasure of reading, and have no sinister wish to transform themselves by that process into what are called "cultivated persons." The compiler feels that any one who succeeds in reading, with reasonable receptivity, the books in this list, must become, at the end, a person with whom it would be a delight to share that most classic of all pleasurable arts — the art of intelligent conversation.

BOOKS AND READING

There is scarcely any question, the sudden explosion of which out of a clear sky, excites more charming perturbation in the mind of a man — professionally, as they say, " of letters "— than the question, so often tossed disdainfully off from young and ardent lips, as to " what one should read," if one has — quite strangely and accidentally — read hitherto absolutely nothing at all.

To secure the privilege of being the purveyor of spiritual germination to such provocatively virgin soil, is for the moment so entirely exciting that all the great stiff images from the dusty museum of " standard authors," seem to swim in a sort of blurred mist before our eyes, and even, some of them at least, to nod and beckon and put out their tongues. After a while, however, the shock of first excitement diminishing, that solemn goblin Responsibility lifts up its head, and though we bang at it and shoo it away, and perhaps lock it up, the pure sweet pleasure of our seductive enterprise, the " native hue," as the poet says, of our " resolution " is henceforth " sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought," and the fine design robbed of its freshest dew.

As a matter of fact, much deeper contemplations and maturer ponderings, only tend, in the long run, to bring us back to our original starting-point. It is just this very bugbear of Responsibility which in the consciences and mouths of grown-up persons sends the bravest of our youth post-haste to confusion — so impinging and inexor-

able are the thing's portentous horns. It is indeed after these maturer considerations that we manage to hit upon the right key really capable of impounding the obtrusive animal; the idea, namely, of indicating to our youthful questioner the importance of æsthetic austerity in these regions — an austerity not only no less exclusive, but far more exclusive than any mandate drawn from the Decalogue.

The necessary matter, in other words, at the beginning of such a tremendous adventure as this blowing wind into the sails of a newly built little schooner, or sometimes even of a poor rain-soaked harbor-rotten brig, bound for the Fortunate Islands, is the inspiration of the right mood, the right tone, the right temper, for the splendid voyage. It is not enough simply to say "acquire æsthetic severity." With spoils so inexhaustible offered to us on every side, some more definite orientation is desirable. Such an orientation, limiting the enormous scope of the enterprise, within the sphere of the possible, can only be wisely found in a person's own individual taste; but since such a taste is, obviously, in a measure "acquired," the compiler of any list of books must endeavor, by a frank and almost shameless assertion of *his* taste, to rouse to a divergent reciprocity the latent taste, still embryotic, perhaps, and quite inchoate, of the young person anxious to make some sort of a start. Such a neophyte in the long voyage — a voyage not without its reefs and shoals — will be much more stirringly provoked to steer with a bold firm hand, even by the angry reaction he may feel from such suggestions, than by a dull academic chart — professing tedious judicial impartiality — of all the continents, promontories, and islands, marked on the official map.

One does not trust youth enough, that is in short what is the matter with our educational method, in this part of it, at least, which concerns "what one is to read." One teases oneself too much, and one's infants, too, poor darlings, with what might be called the "scholastic-veneration-cult"; the cult, namely, of becoming a superior person by reading the best authors. It comes back, after all, to what your young person emphatically *is*, in himself, independent of all this acquiring. If he has the responsive chord, the answering vibration, he may well get more imaginative stimulus from reading "Alice in Wonderland," than from all the Upanishads and Niebelungenlieds in the world. It is a matter of the imagination, and to the question "What is one to read?" the best reply must always be the most personal: "Whatever profoundly and permanently stimulates your imagination." The list of books which follows in this volume constitutes in itself, in the mere perusal of the titles, such a potential stimulation. A reader who demands, for instance, why George Eliot is omitted, and Oliver Onions included; why Sophocles is excluded and Catullus admitted, is brought face to face with that essential right of personal choice in these high matters, which is not only the foundation of all thrilling interest in literature, but the very ground and soil of all-powerful literary creation. The secret of the art of literary taste, may it not be found to be nothing else than the secret of the art of life itself — I mean the capacity for discovering the real fatality, the real predestined direction of one's intrinsic nature and the refusal, when this is found, to waste one's energies in alien paths and irrelevant junketings?

A list of books of the kind appended here, becomes, by

the very reason of its shameless subjectivity, a challenge to the intelligence perusing it — a challenge that is bound, in some degree or another, to fling such a reader back upon his own inveterate prejudices; to fling him back upon them with a sense that it is his affair reasonably to justify them.

From quite another point of view, however, might the appended list find its excuse — I mean as being a typical choice; in other words, the natural choice of a certain particular minority of minds, who, while disagreeing in most essentials, in this one important essential find themselves in singular harmony. And this minority of minds, of minds with the especial prejudices and predilections indicated in this list, undoubtedly has a real and definite existence; there are such people, and any list of books which they made would exclude the writers here excluded, and include the writers here included, though in particular instances, the motives of the choice might differ. For purely psychological reasons then — as a kind of human document in criticism, shall we say? — such a list comes to have its value; nor can the value be anything but enhanced by the obvious fact that in this particular company there are several quite prominent and popular writers, both ancient and modern, signalized, as it were, if not penalized, by their surprising absence. The niches of such venerated names do not exactly call aloud for occupancy, for they are emphatically filled by less popular figures; but they manifest a sufficient sense of incongruity to give the reader's critical conscience the sort of jolt that is so salutary a mental stimulus. A further value might be discovered for our exclusive catalogue, in the interest of noting — and this interest might well ap-

peal to those who would themselves have selected quite a different list — the curious way certain books and writers have of hanging inevitably together, and necessarily implying one another.

Thus it appears that the type of mind — it would be presumptuous to call it the best type of mind — which prefers Euripides to Sophocles, and Heine to Schiller, prefers also Emily Brontë to Charlotte Brontë, and Oliver Onions to Compton Mackenzie. Given the mind that in compiling such a list would at once drag in The Odyssey and The Psalms, and run hastily on to Sir Thomas Browne and Charles Lamb, we are instinctively conscious that when it reaches, with its arbitrary divining rod, our own unlucky age, it will skip quite lightly over Thackeray; wave an ambiguous hand in the direction of Meredith, and sit solemnly down to make elaborate mention of all the published works of Walter Pater, Thomas Hardy and Mr. Henry James.

It seems to me that nothing is more necessary, in regard to the advice to be given to young and ardent people, in the matter of their reading, than some sort of communication of the idea — and it is not an easy idea to convey — that there is in this affair a subtle fusion desirable between one's natural indestructible prejudices, and a certain high authoritative standard; a standard which we may name, for want of a better word, "classical taste," and which itself is the resultant amalgam of all the finest personal reactions of all the finest critical senses, winnowed out, as it were, and austerely purged, by the washing of the waves of time. It will be found, as a matter of fact, that this latter element in the motives of our choice works as a rule negatively rather than positively,

while the positive and active force in our appreciations remains, as it ought to remain, our own inviolable and quite personal bias. The winnowed taste of the ages, acquired by us as a sort of second nature, warns us what to avoid, while our own nerves and palate, stimulated to an ever deepening subtlety, as our choice narrows itself down, tells us what passionately and spontaneously we must snatch up and enjoy.

It will be noted that in what we have tried to indicate as the only possible starting-point for adventurous criticism, there has been a constant assumption of a common ground between sensitive people; a common sensual and psychic language, so to speak, to which appeals may be made, and through which intelligent tokens may be exchanged. This common ground is not necessarily — one is reluctant to introduce metaphysical speculation — any hidden "law of beauty" or "principle of spiritual harmony." It is, indeed, as far as we can ever know for certain, only "objective" in the sense of being essentially human; in the sense, that is, of being something that inevitably appeals to what, below temperamental differences, remains permanent and unchanging in us.

"Nature," as Leonardo says, "is the mistress of the higher intelligencies"; and Goethe, in his most oracular utterances, recalls us to the same truth. What imagination does, and what the personal vision of the individual artist does, is to deal successfully and masterfully with this "given," this basic element. And this basic element, this permanent common ground, this universal human assumption, is just precisely what, in popular language, we call "Nature"; that substratum of objective reality in the appearances of things, which makes it possible for

diversely constructed temperaments to make their differences effective and intelligible.

There could be no recognizable differences, no conversation, in fact, if, in the impossible hypothesis of the absence of any such common language, we all shouted at one another "in vacuo" and out of pure darkness. It is from their refusal to recognize the necessity for something at least relatively objective in what the individual imagination works upon, that certain among modern artists, if not among modern poets, bewilder and puzzle us. They have a right to make endless experiments — every original mind has that — but they cannot let go their hold on some sort of objective solidity without becoming inarticulate, without giving vent to such unrelated and incoherent cries as overtake one in the corridors of Bedlam. "Nature is the mistress of the higher intelligencies," and though the individual imagination is at liberty to treat Nature with a certain creative contempt, it cannot afford to depart altogether from her, lest by relinquishing the common language between men and men, it should simply flap its wings in an enchanted circle, and utter sounds that are not so much different from other sounds, as outside the region where any sound carries an intelligible meaning.

The absurd idea that one gets wise by reading books is probably at the bottom of the abominable pedantry that thrusts so many tiresome pieces of antiquity down the throats of youth. There is no talisman for getting wise — some of the wisest in the world never open a book, and yet their native wit, so heavenly-free from "culture," would serve to challenge Voltaire. Lovers of books, like other infatuated lovers, best know the account they find

in their exquisite obsessions. None of the explanations they give seem to cover the field of their enjoyment. The thing is a passion; a sort of delicate madness, and like other passions, quite unintelligible to those who are outside. Persons who read for the purpose of making a success of their added erudition, or the better to adapt themselves — what a phrase! — to their "life's work," are, to my thinking, like the wretches who throw flowers into graves. What sacrilege, to trail the reluctances and coynesses, the shynesses and sweet reserves of these "furtivi amores" at the heels of a wretched ambition to be "cultivated" or learned, or to "get on" in the world!

Like the kingdom of heaven and all other high and sacred things, the choicest sorts of books only reveal the perfume of their rare essence to those who love them for themselves in pure disinterestedness. Of course they "mix in," these best-loved authors, with every experience we encounter; they throw around places, hours, situations, occasions, a quite special glamour of their own, just as one's more human devotions do; but though they float, like a diffused aroma, round every circumstance of our days, and may even make tolerable the otherwise intolerable hours of our impertinent "life's work," we do not love them because they help us here or help us there; or make us wiser or make us better; we love them because they are what they are, and we are what we are; we love them, in fact, for the beautiful reason which the author of that noble book — a book not in our present list, by the way, because of something obstinately tough and tedious in him — I mean Montaigne's Essays — loved his sweet friend Etienne.

Any other commerce between books and their readers

smacks of Baconian "fruits" and University lectures. It is a prostitution of pleasure to profit.

As with all the rare things in life, the most delicate flavor of our pleasure is found not exactly and precisely in the actual taste of the author himself; not, I mean, in the snatching of huge bites out of him, but in the fragrance of anticipation; in the dreamy solicitations of indescribable afterthoughts; in those "airy tongues that syllable men's names" on the "sands and shores" of the remote margins of our consciousness. How delicious a pleasure there is in carrying about with us wherever we go a new book or a new translation from the pen of our especial master! We need not open it; we need not read it for days; but it is there — there to be caressed and to caress — when everything is propitious, and the profane voices are hushed.

I suppose, to take an instance that has for myself a peculiar appeal, the present edition — "brought out" by the excellent house of Macmillan — of the great Dostoievsky, is producing even now in the sensibility of all sorts and conditions of queer readers, a thrilling series of recurrent pleasures, like the intermittent visits of one's well-beloved.

Would to God the mortal days of geniuses like Dostoievsky could be so extended that for all the years of one's life, one would have such works, still not quite finished, in one's lucky hands!

I sometimes doubt whether these sticklers for "the art of condensation" are really lovers of books at all. For myself, I would class their cursed short stories with their teasing "economy of material," as they call it, with those "books that are no books," those checker boards and moral treatises which used to annoy Elia so.

Yes, I have a sneaking feeling that all this modern fuss about "art" and the "creative vision" and "the projection of visualized images," is the itching vice of quite a different class of people, from those who, in the old, sweet, epicurean way, loved to loiter through huge digressive books, with the ample unpremeditated enjoyment of leisurely travelers wayfaring along a wonderful road. How many luckless innocents have teased and fretted their minds into a forced appreciation of that artistic ogre Flaubert, and his laborious pursuit of his precious "exact word," when they might have been pleasantly sailing down Rabelais' rich stream of immortal nectar, or sweetly hugging themselves over the lovely mischievousness of Tristram Shandy! But one must be tolerant; one must make allowances. The world of books is no puritanical bourgeois-ridden democracy; it is a large free country, a great Pantagruelian Utopia, ruled by noble kings.

Our "One Hundred Best Books" need not be yours, nor yours ours; the essential thing is that in this brief interval between darkness and darkness, which we call our life, we should be thrillingly and passionately amused; innocently, if so it can be arranged — and what better than books lends itself to that? — and harmlessly, too, let us hope, God help us, but at any rate, amused, for the only unpardonable sin is the sin of taking this passing world too gravely. Our treasure is not here; it is in the kingdom of heaven, and the kingdom of heaven is Imagination. Imagination! How all other ways of escape from what is mediocre in our tangled lives grow pale beside that high and burning star!

With Imagination to help us we can make something of our days, something of the drama of this confused tur-

moil, and perhaps, after all — who can tell? — there is more in it than mere "amusement." Once and again, as we pause in our reading, there comes a breath, a whisper, a rumor, of something else; of something over and above that "eternal now" which is the wisest preoccupation of our passion, but not wise are those who would seek to confine this fleeting intimation within the walls of reason or of system. It comes; it goes; it is; it is not. The Hundred Best Books did not bring it; the Hundred Best Books cannot take it away. Strangely and wonderfully it blends itself with those vague memories of what we have read, somewhere, sometime, and not always alone. Strangely and wonderfully it blends itself with those other moments when the best books in the world seem irrelevant, and all "culture" an impertinent intrusion; but however it comes and however it goes, it is the thing that makes our gravity ridiculous; our philosophy pedantic. It is the thing that gives to the "amusements" of the imagination that touch of burning fire; that breath of wider air; that taste of sharper salt, which, arriving when we least expect it, and least — heaven knows — deserve it, makes any final opinion upon the stuff of this world vain and false; and any condemnation of the opinions of others foolish and empty. It destroys our assurances as it alleviates our miseries, and in some unspeakable way, like a primrose growing on the edge of a sepulchre, it flings forth upon the heavy night, a fleeting signal, "Bon espoir y gist au fond!"

ONE HUNDRED BEST BOOKS

1. **The Psalms of David.**

   The Psalms remain, whether in the Latin version or in the authorized English translation, the most pathetic and poignant, as well as the most noble and dignified of all poetic literature. The rarest spirits of our race will always return to them at every epoch in their lives for consolation, for support and for repose.

2. **Homer. The Odyssey.** *Butcher and Lang's Prose Translation.*

   The Odyssey must continue to appeal to adventurous persons more powerfully than any other of the ancient stories because, blent with the classic quality of its pure Greek style, there can be found in it that magical element of thrilling romance, which belongs not to one age, but to all time.

3. **The Bacchanals. The Bacchæ of Euripides.** *Translated by Professor Gilbert Murray.*

   Euripides, the favourite poet of John Milton and Goethe, is the most modern in feeling, the most romantic in mood of all the Greek poets. One is conscious that in his work, as in the sculpture of Praxiteles, the calm beauty of the Apollonian temper is touched by the wilder rhythm of the perilous music of Dionysus.

4. **Horace.** *Any selection in Latin of The Odes of Horace and complete prose translation published by Macmillan.*

Flawlessly hammered out, as if from eternal bronze —"ære perennius"— The Odes of Horace are the consummate expression of the pride, the reserve, the tragic playfulness, the epicurean calm, the absolute distinction of the Imperial Roman spirit. A few lines taken at random and learned by heart would act as a talisman in all hours to drive away the insolent pressure of the vulgar and common crowd.

5. **Catullus.** *Any Latin edition and the prose translation published by Macmillan bound up with Tibullus.*

Catullus, the contemporary of Julius Cæsar, is, of all the ancient lyrical poets, the one most modern and neurotic in feeling. One discerns in his work, breathing through the ancient Roman reserve, the pressure of that passionate and rebellious reaction to life, which we enjoy in the most magical of all later poets from Villon to Verlaine.

6. **Dante's Divine Comedy.** *Best edition the "Temple Classics," in three small volumes, with the Italian original and English prose translation on opposite pages.*

Dante's poetry can legitimately be enjoyed in single great passages, of which there are more in the "Inferno" than in the other sections of the poem. His peculiar quality is a certain blending of mordant realism with a high and penetrating beauty. There is no need in reading him to vex oneself with symbolic interpretations. He is at his best, when

from behind his scholastic philosophy, bursts forth, in direct personal betrayal, his pride, his humility, his passion, and his disdain.

7. **Rabelais.** *The English translation with the Doré illustrations.*

Rabelais is the philosopher's Bible and his book of outrageous jests. He is the recondite cult of wise and magnanimous spirits. He reconciles Nature with Art, Man with God, and religious piety with shameless enjoyment. His style restores to us our courage and our joy; and his noble buffoonery gives us back the sweet wantonness of our youth. Rabelais is the greatest intellect in literature. No one has ever had a humor so large; an imagination so creative, or a spirit so world-swallowing, so humane, so friendly.

8. **Candide.** *Any French edition or English translation.*

Voltaire was a true man of action, a knight of the Holy Ghost. He plunged fiercely into the human arena, and fought through a laborious life, against obscurantism, stupidity and tyranny. He had a clear-cut, aristocratic mind. He hated mystical balderdash, clumsy barbarity, and stupid hypocrisy. Candide is not only a complete refutation of optimism; it is a book full of that mischievous humor, which has the power, more than anything else, of reconciling us to the business of enduring life.

9. **Shakespeare.** *In the Temple edition.*

It is time Shakespeare was read for the beauty of his poetry, and enjoyed without pedantry and with some imagination. The less usual and more cynical of his plays, such as Troilus, and Cressida, Measure

for Measure and Timon of Athens, will be found to contain some very interesting commentaries upon life.

The Shakespearean attitude of mind is quite a definite and articulate one, and one that can be, by slow degrees, acquired, even by persons who are not cultivated or clever. It is an attitude "compounded of many simples," and, like the melancholy of Jaques, it wraps us about "in a most humorous sadness." But the essential secret of Shakespeare's genius is best apprehended in the felicity of certain isolated passionate speeches, and in the magic of his songs.

10. **Milton.** *Any edition.*

No epicurean lover of the subtler delicacies in poetic rhythm or of the more exalted and translunar harmonies in the imaginative suggestiveness of words, can afford to leave Milton untouched. In sheer felicity of beauty — the beauty of suggestive words, each one carrying "a perfume in the mention," and together, by their arrangement in relation to one another, conveying a thrill of absolute and final satisfaction — no poem in our language surpasses Lycidas, and only the fine great odes of John Keats approach or equal it.

There are passages, too, in Paradise Lost, Paradise Regained and Samson Agonistes, which, for calm, flowing, and immortal loveliness, are not surpassed in any poetry in the world.

Milton's work witnesses to the value in art of what is ancient and traditional, but while he willingly uses every tradition of antiquity, he stamps all he

writes with his own formidable image and superscription.

11. **Sir Thomas Browne. Religio Medici and Urn Burial.** *In the "Scott Library" Series.*

The very spirit of ancient Norwich, the mellowest and most historic of all English cities, breathes in these sumptuous and aromatic pages. After Lamb and Pater, both of whom loved him well, Browne is the subtlest adept in the recondite mysteries of rhythmic prose who can be enjoyed in our language. Not to catch the cadences of his peculiar music is to confess oneself deaf to the finer harmonies of words.

12. **Goethe. Faust,** *translated in English Poetry by Bayard Taylor.* **Wilhelm Meister,** *in Carlyle's translation.* **Goethe's Conversations with Eckerman,** *translation in Bohn's Library.*

No other human name, except Da Vinci's, carries the high associations of oracular and occult wisdom as far as Goethe's does. He hears the voices of "the Mothers" more clearly than other men and in heathen loneliness he "builds up the pyramid of his existence."

The deep authority of his formidable insight can be best enjoyed, not without little side-lights of a laconic irony, in the "Conversations"; while in Wilhelm Meister we learn to become adepts in the art of living in the Beautiful and True, in Faust that abysmal doubt as to the whole mad business of life is undermined with a craft equal to his own in the delineation and defeat of "the queer son of Chaos."

15. **Nietzsche. Zarathustra, The Joyful Wisdom, and Ecce Homo** *are all translated in the English edition of Foulis and published in America by Macmillan. Lichtenberger's exposition of his doctrines is in the same series. The most artistic life of him is by Daniel Halêvy, translated from the French.*

Nietzsche's writings when they fall into the hands of Philistines are more misunderstood than any others. To appreciate his noble and tragic distinction with the due pinch of Attic salt it is necessary to be possessed of more imagination than most persons are able to summon up. The dramatic grandeur of Nietzsche's extraordinary intellect overtops all the flashes of his psychological insight; and his terrific conclusions remain as mere foot-prints of his progress from height to height.

18. **Heine. Heine's Prose works with the "Confessions,"** *translated in the "Scott Library." A good short life of Heine in the "Great Writers" Series.*

Heine's genius remains unique. Full of dreamy attachment to Germany he lived and died in Paris, but his heart was always with the exiles of Israel.

Mocker and ribald, he touches depths of sentimental tenderness sounded by none other. He fooled the philosophers, provoked the pious, and confused the minds of his free-thinking friends by outbursts of wilful reaction. He sticks the horns of satyrish "diablerie" on the lovely forehead of the most delicate romance; and he flings into his magical poems of love and the sea the naughty mud-pellets of an outrageous capriciousness.

19. **Sudermann. Song of Songs.** *Translation into English published by Huebsch of New York.*
Sudermann is the most remarkable and characteristic of modern German writers. His massive and laborious realism, his firm and exhaustive exposition of turbulent and troubled hearts, his heavy sledge-hammer style, his comprehension of the shadowy background of the most ponderous sensuality, are all found at their best in this solemn and sordid and pitiable tale.

20. **Hauptmann. The Fool in Christ,** *translation published by Huebsch, New York.*
Hauptmann seems, of all recent Teutonic authors, the one who has in the highest degree that tender imaginative sentiment mixed with rugged and humorous piety which one finds in the old German Protestant Mystics and in such works of art as the engravings of Albert Durer and the Wooden Madonna of Nuremburg. "The Fool in Christ"—outside some of the characters in Dostoievsky — is the nearest modern approach to a literary interpretation of what remains timeless and permanent in the Christ-Idea.

21. **Ibsen.** *Any edition of Ibsen containing the* **Wild Duck.**
Ibsen is still the most formidable of obstinate individualists. Absolute self-reliance is the note he constantly strikes. He is obsessed by the psychology of moral problems; but for him there are no universal ethical laws —"the golden rule is that there is no golden rule"— thus while in the Pillars of Society he advocates candid confession and honest

revelation of the truth of things; in the "Wild Duck" he attacks the pig-headed meddler, who comes "dunning us with claims of the Ideal." Ultimately, though absorbed in "matters of conscience," it is as an artist rather than as a philosopher that he visualizes the world.

22. **Strindberg. The Confessions of a Fool.**
Strindberg has obtained, because of his own neurotic and almost feminine clairvoyance, a diabolical insight into the perversities of the feminine character. This merciless insight manifested in all his works reaches its intensest degree in the "Confessions of a Fool," where the woman implicated surpasses the perversities of the normal as greatly as the lashing energy with which he pursues her to her inmost retreats surpasses the vengeance of any ordinary lover.

23. **Emerson.** *Routledge's complete works of Emerson, or any other edition containing everything in one volume.*
The clear, chaste, remote and distinguished wisdom of Emerson with its shrewd preacher's wit and country-bred humor, will always be of stirring and tonic value to certain kindred minds. Others will prove him of little worth; but it is to be noted that Nietzsche found him a sane and noble influence principally on the ground of his serene detachment from the phenomena of sin and disease and death.
He will always remain suggestive and stimulating to those who demand a spiritual interpretation of the Universe but reluct at committing themselves to any particular creed.

24. **Walt Whitman.** *The complete unexpurgated edition of all his poems, with his prose works and Mr. Traubel's books about him as a further elucidation.*

Walt Whitman is the only Optimist and perhaps the only prophet of Democracy one can read without shame. The magical beauty of his style at its best has not even yet received complete justice. He has the power of restoring us to courage and joy even under circumstances of aggravated gloom. He puts us in some indescribable manner " en rapport " with the large, cool, liquid spaces and with the immense and transparent depths.

More than any he is the poet of passionate friendship and the poet of all those exquisite evasive emotions which arise when our loves and our regrets are blended with the presence of Nature.

25. **Edgar Lee Masters. Spoon River Anthology,** *published by Macmillan.*

After Whitman and Poe, Mr. Masters is by far the most original and interesting of American poets. There is something Chaucerian about the quizzical and whimsical manner in which he tells his brief and homely stories. His characters are penetrated with the bleak and yet cheerful tone of the " Middle West." Something quaint, humorous and astringent emerges as their dominant note.

Mr. Masters has the massive ironical observation and the shrewd humane wit of the great English novelists of the eighteenth century. His dead people reveal " the true truth " of their sordid and troubled lives. The little chances, the unguessed-at

accidents, the undeserved blows of a capricious destiny, which batter so many of us into helpless inertness, are the aspects of life which interest him most.

26. Theodore Dreiser. The Titan.

Of all modern novelists Theodore Dreiser most entirely catches the spirit of America. Here is the huge torrential stream of material energies. Here are the men and women, so pushed and driven and parched and bleached, by the enormous forces of industry and commerce, that all distinction in them seems to be reduced to a strange colorlessness; while the primordial animal cravings, greedy, earth-born, fumble after their aims across the sad and littered stage of sombre scenery.

There is something epic — something enormous and amorphous — like the body of an elemental giant — about each of these books. In the "Titan," especially, the peculiar power of Dreiser's massive, coulter-like impetus is evident. Here we realize how, between animal passion and material ambition, there is little room left in such a nature as Cooperwood's for any complicated subtlety. All is simple, direct, hard and healthy — a very epitome and incarnation of the life-force, as it manifests itself in America.

27. Cervantes. Don Quixote. *In any translation except those vulgarized by eighteenth century taste.*

Cervantes' great, ironical, romantic story is written in a style so noble, so nervous, so humane, so branded with reality, that, as the wise critic has said, the mere touch and impact of it puts courage into

our veins. It is not necessary to read every word of this old book. There are tedious passages. But not to have ever opened it; not to have caught the tone, the temper, the terrible courage, the infinite sadness of it, is to have missed being present at one of the "great gestures" of the undying, unconquerable spirit of humanity.

28. **Victor Hugo. The Toilers of the Sea.** *In any translation.*

Victor Hugo is the greatest of all incorrigible romanticists. Something between a prophet, a charlatan, a rhetorician, and a spoiled child, he believes in God, in democracy, in innocence, in justice, and he has a noble and unqualified devotion to human heroism and the depths of the dangerous sea. He has that arbitrary, maniacal inventive imagination which is very rare except in children — and in spite of his theatrical gestures he has the power of conjuring up scenes of incredible beauty and terror.

29. **Balzac. Lost Illusions. Cousin Bette. Pére Goriot. Human Comedy,** *in any translation. Saintsbury's is as good as any.*

Balzac's books create a complete world, which has many points of contact with reality; but, in a deep essential sense, is the projection of the novelist's own passionate imagination. A thundering tide of subterranean energy, furious and titanic, sweeps, with its weight of ponderous details, through every page of these dramatic volumes. Every character has its obsession, its secret vice, its spiritual drug. Even when, as in the case of Vautrin, he lets his demonic fancy carry him very far, there is a grandeur, an

amplitude, a smouldering flame of passion, which redeem a thousand preposterous extravagances.

His dramatic psychology is often drowned in the tide of his creative energy; but though his world is not always the world of our experience, it is always a world in which we are magnetized to feel at home. It is consistent with its own amazing laws; the laws of the incredible Balzacian genius. Profoundly moral in its basic tendency, the "Human Comedy" seems to point, in its philosophical undercurrent, at the permanent need in our wayward and childish emotionalism, for wise and master-guides, both in the sphere of religion and in the sphere of politics.

32. **Guy de Maupassant. Le Maison Tellier. Madame Tellier's Establishment.** *Any translation, preferably not one bound in paper or in an "Edition de Luxe."*

Guy de Maupassant's short stories remain, with those of Henry James and Joseph Conrad, the very best of their kind. After "Madame Tellier's Establishment" perhaps the stories called respectively "A Farm Girl" and "Love" are the best he wrote.

He has the eternal excellencies of savage humanity, savage sincerity, and savage brevity. His pessimism is deep, absolute, unshaken; — and the world, as we know it, deserves what he gives it of sensualized literary reactions, each one like the falling thud of the blade of a murderous axe.

His racking, scooping, combing insight, into the recesses of man's natural appetites will never be surpassed. How under the glance of his Norman

anger, all manner of pretty subterfuges fade away; and "the real thing" stands out, as Nature and the Earth know it — stark, bleak, terrible and lovely." His subjects may not wander very far from the basic situations. He does not deal in spiritual subtleties. But when he hits, he hits the mark.

33. **Stendhal (Henri Beyle). Le Rouge et le Noir.**
Either the original French or any translation, if possible with a preface; for the life of Stendhal is of extraordinary interest.

Standhal is one of those who, following Goethe and anticipating Nietzsche, has not hesitated to propound the psychological justifications for a life based upon pagan rather than Christian ethics. A shrewd and sly observer, with his own peculiar brand of the egoistic cult, Stendhal lived a life of desperately absorbing emotions, most of them intellectual and erotic. He made an æsthetic use of the Will to Power before even Nietzsche used that singular expression. In "Le Rouge et le Noir" the eternal sex-struggle with its fierce accompaniment of "Odi et Amo" is concentrated in the clash of opposing forms of pride; the pride of intellect against the pride of sex-vanity.

No writer has ever lived with more contempt for mere sedentary theories or a fiercer mania for the jagged and multifarious edges of life's pluralistic eccentricity. For any reader teased and worried by idealistic perversion this obstinate materialistic sage will have untold value. And yet he knows, none better, the place of sentiment in life!

34. **Anatole France. L'Orme de Mail. L'Abbe Jerome Coignard. Le Livre de mon Ami.** *Either in French or the authorized English translation.*

Anatole France, now translated into English, is the most classical, the most ironical, the most refined, of all modern European writers. He is also, of all others, the most antipathetic to the Anglo-Saxon type of mind. In a word he is a humanist of the great tradition — a civilized artist — a great and wise man. He is Rabelaisian and Voltairian, at the same time. His style has something of the urbanity, the unction, the fine malice, of Renan; but it has also a quality peculiar to its creator — a sort of transparent objectivity, lucid as rarified air, and contemptuously cold as a fragment of antique marble. Monsieur Bergeret, who appears in all four of the masterpieces devoted to Contemporary France, is a creation worthy, as some one has said, of the author of Tristram Shandy. One cannot forget that Anatole France spent his childhood among the bookshops on the South side of the Seine. We are conscious all the while in reading him of the wise, tender, pitiful detachment of a true scholar of the classics, contemplating the mad pell-mell of human life from a certain epicurean remoteness, and loving and mocking the sons and daughters of men, as if they were little children or comical small animals.

37. **Remy de Gourmont. Une Nuit au Luxembourg.** *Translated with a preface by Arthur Ransome, published by Luce, Boston.*

Remy de Gourmont's death must be regretted by all lovers of the rare in art and the remote in charac-

ter. As a poet his "Litany of the Rose" has that strange, ambiguous, sinister, and lovely appeal, the full appreciation of which is an initiation into all the "enclosed gardens" of the world.

He is a great critic — perhaps the greatest since Walter Pater — and as a philosopher his constant and frank advocacy of a noble and shameless Hedonism has helped to clear the air in the track of Nietzsche's thunder-bolts.

His audacity in placing an exposition of the very principles of Epicurean Hedonism, touched with Spinozistic equanimity, into the mouth of our Lord, wandering through the Luxembourg Gardens, may perhaps startle certain gentle souls, but the Dorian delicacy of what might for a moment appear blasphemous robs this charming Idyll of any gross or merely popular profanity. It is a book for those who have passed through more than one intellectual Renaissance. Like the "Golden Ass" of Apuleius it has a philosophical justification for its mythological audacity.

38. **Paul Bourget. Le Disciple.**

"Le Disciple" is perhaps the best work of this voluminous and interesting writer. Devoid of irony, deficient in humor, lacking any large imaginative power, Paul Bourget holds, all the same, an unassailable place among French writers. Though a devoted adherent of Goethe and Stendhal, Bourget represents, along with Bordeaux, the conservative ethical reaction. He upholds Catholicism and the sacredness of the "home." He is a master in plot and has a clear, vigorous and appealing style. A

gravely portentous sentiment sometimes spoils his tragic effects; but every lover of Paris will enjoy the unctuous elaboration of the "backgrounds" of his stories, touched often with the most delicate and mellow evocations of that City's atmosphere.

39. **Romain Rolland. Jean Christophe.** *Translated by Gilbert Cannan.*

Rolland's "Christophe" is without doubt the most remarkable book that has appeared in Europe since Nietzsche's "Ecce Homo."

It is a profoundly suggestive treatise upon the relations between art and life. It contains a deep and heroic philosophy — the philosophy of the worship of the mysterious life-force as God; and of the reaching out beyond the turmoil of good and evil towards some vast and dimly articulated reconciliation. Since "Wilhelm Meister" no book has been written more valuable as an intellectual ladder to the higher levels of æsthetic thought and feeling.

Massive and dramatic, powerful and suggestive, it magnetizes us into an acceptance of its daring and optimistic hopes for the world; of its noble suggestions of a spiritual synthesis of the opposing race-traditions of Europe. Of all the books mentioned in this list it is the one which the compiler would most strongly recommend to the notice of those anxious to win a firmer intellectual standing-ground.

40. **Gabriele D'Annunzio. The Flame of Life. The Triumph of Death.** *Translated by Arthur Hornblow.*

D'Annunzio is the most truly Italian, the most inveterately Latin, of all recent writers. Without

light and shade, without "nuance," without humor or irony, he compels our attention by the clear-cut, monumental images he projects, by the purple and scarlet splendor of his imperial dreams.

His philosophy, though lacking in the deep and tragic imagination of Nietzsche, has something of the Nietzschean intellectual fury. He teaches a shameless and antinomian hedonism, narrower, less humane, but more fervid and emotional, than that taught by Remy de Gourmont.

In "The Triumph of Death" we find a fierce smoldering voluptuousness, expressed with a hard and brutal realism which recalls the frescoes on the walls of ancient Pompeii. In "The Flame of Life" we have in superb rhetoric the most colored and ardent description of Venice to be found in all literature. Perhaps the finest passage he ever wrote is that account of the speech of the Master of Life in the Doge's Palace with its incomparable eulogy upon Veronese and its allusion to Pisanello's head of Sigismondo Malatesta.

42. **Dostoievsky. Crime and Punishment. The Idiot. The Brothers Karamazov. The Insulted and Injured. The Possessed.** *Translated by Constance Garnett and published by Macmillan. Other translations in Everyman's Library.*

Dostoievsky is the greatest and most racial of all Russian writers. He is the subtlest psychologist in fiction. As an artist he has a dark and sombre intensity and an imaginative vehemence only surpassed by Shakespeare. As a philosopher he anticipates Nietzsche in the direction of his insight, though

in his conclusions he is diametrically opposite. He teaches that out of weakness, abnormality, perversity, foolishness, desperation, abandonment, and a morbid pleasure in humiliation, it is possible to arrive at high and unutterable levels of spiritual ecstasy. His ideal is sanctity — not morality — and his revelations of the impassioned and insane motives of human nature — its instinct towards self-destruction for instance — will never be surpassed for their terrible and convincing truth.

The strange Slavophil dream of the regeneration of the world by the power of the Russian soul and the magic of the "White Christ who comes out of Russia" could not be more arrestingly expressed than in these passionate and extraordinary works of art.

47. **Turgeniev. Virgin Soil. A Sportsman's Sketches.** *Translated by Constance Garnett. And "Lisa" in Everyman's Library.*

Turgeniev is by far the most "artistic" as he is the most disillusioned and ironical of Russian writers. With a tender poetical delicacy, almost worthy of Shakespeare, he sketches his appealing portraits of young girls. His style is clear — objective — winnowed and fastidious. He has certain charming old-fashioned weaknesses — as for instance his trick of over-emphasizing the differences between his bad and good characters; but there is a clear-cut distinction, and a lucid charm about his work that reminds one of certain old crayon drawings or certain delicate water-color sketches. His allusions to natural scenery are always introduced with peculiar

appropriateness and are never permitted to dominate the dramatic element of the story as happens so often in other writers.

There is a sad and tender vein of unobtrusive moralizing running through his work but one is conscious that at bottom he is profoundly pessimistic and disenchanted. The gaiety of Turgeniev is winning and unforced; his sentiment natural and never "staled or rung upon." The pensive detachment of a sensitive and yet not altogether unworldly spirit seems to be the final impression evoked by his books.

50. **Gorki — Foma Gordyeff.** *Translation published by Scribners.*

Maxim Gorki is one of the most interesting of Russian writers. His books have that flavour of the soil and that courageous spirit of vagabondage and social independence which is so rare and valuable a quality in literature.

"Foma Gordyeff" is, after Dostoievsky's masterpieces, the most suggestive and arresting of Russian stories. That paralysis of the will which descends like an evil cloud upon Foma and at the same time seems to cause the ground to open under his feet and precipitate him into mysterious depths of nothingness, is at once tragically significant of certain aspects of the Russian soul and full of mysterious warnings to all those modern spirits in whom the power of action is "sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought."

For those who have been "fooled to the top of their bent" by the stupidities and brutalities of the crowd

there is a savage satisfaction in reading of Foma's insane outbursts of misanthropy.

51. **Tchekoff — Seagull.** *Tchekoff's plays and short stories are published by Scribners in admirable translations.*

Tchekoff is one of the gentlest and sweetest tempered of Russian writers. There is in him a genuine graciousness, a politeness of soul, an innate delicacy, which is not touched — as such qualities often are in the work of Turgeniev — with any kind of self-conscious Olympianism. A doctor, a consumptive, and a passionate lover of children, there is a whimsical humanity about all that Tchekoff writes which has a singular and quite special appeal.

The "Seagull" is a play full of delicate subtleties and dreamy glimpses of shy humane wisdom. The manner in which outward things — the mere background and scenery of the play — are used to deepen and enhance the dramatic interest is a thing peculiarly characteristic of this author. Tchekoff has that kind of imaginative sensibility which makes every material object one encounters significant with spiritual intimations.

The mere business of plot — whether in his plays or stories — is not the important matter. The important matter is a certain sudden and pathetic illumination thrown upon the essential truth by some casual grouping of persons or of things — some emphatic or symbolic gesture — some significant movement among the silent "listeners."

52. **Artzibasheff. Sanine,** *translation published by Huebsch.*

Artzibasheff is an extremist. The suicidal "motif" in the "Breaking-point" is worked out with an appalling and devastating thoroughness.

Pessimism, in a superficial sense, could hardly go further; though compared with Dostoievsky's insight into the "infinite" in character, one is conscious of a certain closing of doors and narrowing of issues. "Sanine" himself is a sort of idealization of the sublimated common sense which seems to be this writer's selected virtue. Artzibasheff appears to advocate, as the wisest and sanest way of dealing with life, a certain robust and contemptuous self-assertion, kindly, genial, without baseness or malice; but free from any scruple and quite untroubled by remorse.

If regarded seriously — as he appears to be intended to be — as an approximate human ideal, one cannot help feeling that in spite of his humorous anarchism and subjective zest for life, Sanine has in him something sententious and tiresome. He is, so to speak, an immoral prig; nor do his vivacious spirits compensate us for the lack of delicacy and irony in him. On the other hand there is something direct, downright and "honest" about his clear-thinking, and his shameless eroticism which wins our liking and affection, if not our admiration. Artzibasheff is indeed one of the few writers who dare excite our sympathy not only for the seduced in this world but for the seducer.

53. Sterne — Tristram Shandy.

Sterne is a writer who less than any one else in the present list reveals the secrets of his manner and

mind to the casual and hasty reader. "Tristram Shandy" and "The Sentimental Journey" are books to be enjoyed slowly and lingeringly, with many humorous after-thoughts and a certain Rabelaisian unction. A shrewd and ironical wisdom, gentle and light-fingered and redolent of evasive sentiment, is evoked from these digressive and wanton pages.

At his best Sterne is capable of an imaginative interpretation of character which for delicacy and subtlety has never been surpassed. For the Epicurean in literature, his unfailing charm will be found in his style — a style so baffling in the furtive beauty of its disarming simplicity that even the greatest of literary critics have been unable to analyze its peculiar flavour. There is a winnowed purity about it, and a kind of elfish grace; and with both these things there mixes, strangely enough, a certain homely, almost Dutch domesticity, quaint and mellow and a little wanton — like a picture by Jan Steen.

54. Jonathan Swift. Tale of a Tub.

Swift's mysterious and saturnine character, his outbursts of terrible rage; his exquisite moments of tenderness; his sledge-hammer blows; his diabolical irony; form a dramatic and tragic spectacle which no psychologist can afford to miss.

With the "saeva indignatio" alluded to in his own epitaph, he puts his back, as it were, to the "flamantia moenia mundi" and hits out, insanely and blindly, at the human crowd he loathes. His se-

cretive and desperate passion for Stella, his little girl pupil; his barbarous treatment of Vanessa — his savage championship of the Irish people against the Government — make up the dominant "notes" of a character so formidable that the terror of his personality strikes us with the force of an engine of destruction.

His misanthropy is like the misanthropy of Shakespeare's Timon — his crushing sarcasms strike blow after blow at the poor flesh and blood he despises. The hatefulness of average humanity drives him to distraction and in his madness, like a wounded Titan, he spares nothing. To the whole human race he seems to utter the terrible words he puts into the mouth of God:

"I to such blockheads set my wit,
And damn you all — Go, go, you're bit!"

55. Charles Lamb. The Essays of Elia.

Charles Lamb remains, of all English prose-writers, the one whose manner is the most beautiful. So rich, so delicate, so imaginative, so full of surprises, is the style of this seductive writer, that, for sheer magic and inspiration, his equals can only be found among the very greatest poets.

It is impossible to over-estimate the value of Charles Lamb's philosophy. He indicates in his delicate evasive way — not directly, but as it were, in little fragments and morsels and broken snatches — a deep and subtle reconciliation between the wisdom of Epicurus and the wisdom of Christ. And through and beyond all this, there may be felt, as

with the great poets, an indescribable sense of something withdrawn, withheld, reserved, inscrutable — a sense of a secret, rather to be intimated to the initiated, than revealed to the vulgar — a sense of a clue to a sort of Pantagruelian serenity; a serenity produced by no crude optimism but by some happy inward knowledge of a neglected hope. The great Rabelaisian motto, "bon espoir y gist au fond!" seems to emanate from the most wistful and poignant of his pages. He pities the unpitied, he redeems the commonplace, he makes the ordinary as if it were not ordinary, and by the sheer genius of his imagination he throws an indescribable glamour over the "little things" of the darkest of our days.

Moving among old books, old houses, old streets, old acquaintances, old wines, old pictures, old memories, he is yet possessed of so original and personal a touch that his own wit seems as though it were the very soul and body of the qualities he so caressingly interprets.

56. Sir Walter Scott. Guy Mannering. Bride of Lammermoor. Heart of Midlothian.

The large, easy, leisurely manner of Scott's writing, its digressiveness, its nonchalant carelessness, its indifference to artistic quality, has in some sort of way numbed and atrophied the interest in his work of those who have been caught up and waylaid by the modern spirit. And yet Scott's novels have ample and admirable excellencies. In his expansive and digressive fashion he can give his characters — especially the older and the more idiosyn-

cratic among them — a surprising and convincing verisimilitude.

He can create a plot which, though not dramatically flawless, has movement and energy and stir. The sweetness and modesty of his disposition lends itself to his portrayal of the more gracious aspects of human life, especially as seen in the humours and oddities of very simple and naïve persons.

Under the stress of occasional emotion he can rise to quite noble heights of feeling and he is able to throw a startling glamour of romance over certain familiar and recurrent human situations. At his best there is a grandeur and simplicity of utterance about what his characters say and an ease and largeness of sympathy about his own commentaries upon them, which must win admiration even from those most avid of modern pathology. Without the passion of Balzac, or the insight of Dostoievsky, or the art of Turgeniev, there is yet, in the sweetness of Scott's own personality, and in the biblical grandeur of certain of the scenes he evokes, a quality and a charm which it would be at once foolish and arbitrary to neglect.

59. Thackeray. The History of Henry Esmond.

Thackeray is a writer who occupies a curious and very interesting position. Devoid of the noble and romantic sympathies of Scott, and corrupted to the basic fibres of his being by Early Victorian snobbishness, he is yet — none can deny it — a powerful creator of living people and an accomplished and graceful stylist.

Without philosophy, without faith, without moral

courage, the uneasy slave of conventional morality, and with a hopeless vein of sheer worldly philistinism in his book, Thackeray is yet able, by a certain unconquerable insight into the motives and impulses of mediocre people, and by a certain weight and mass of creative force, to give a convincing reality to his pictures of life, which is almost devastating in its sneering and sentimental accuracy.

The most winning and attractive thing about him is his devotion to the eighteenth century; a century whose manners he is able to depict in his large and gracious way without being disturbed by the pressure of that contemporary vulgarity which finds a too lively response in something bourgeois and snobbish in his own nature.

Dealing with the eighteenth century he escapes not only from his age but from himself.

60. Charles Dickens. Great Expectations.

The compiler has placed in this list only one of Dickens' books for a somewhat different reason from that which has influenced him in other cases. All Dickens' novels have a unique value, and such an equal value, that almost any one of them, chosen at random, can serve as an example of the rest.

Those who still are not prohibited, by temperamental difficulty or by some modern fashion, from enjoying the peculiar atmosphere of this astonishing person's work, will be found reverting to him constantly and indiscriminately. "Great Expectations" is perhaps, as a more "artistic" book than the rest, the most fitted of them all to entice towards a more sympathetic understanding of his mood, those

who are held from reading him by some more or less accidental reason. The most characteristic thing about this great genius is the power he possesses of breathing palpable life into what is often called the inanimate. Like Hans Andersen, the writer of fairy-stories, and, in a measure, like all children, Dickens endows with fantastic spirituality the most apparently dead things in our ordinary environment.

His imagination plays superb tricks with such objects and things, touching the most dilapidated of them with a magic such as the genius of a great poet uses, when dealing with nature — only the "nature" of Dickens is made of less lovely matters than leaves and flowers.

The wild exaggerations of Dickens — his reckless contempt for realistic possibility — need not hinder us from enjoying, apart from his revelling humor and his too facile sentiment, those inspired outbursts of inevitable truth, wherein the inmost identity of his queer people stands revealed to us. His world may be a world of goblins and fairies, but there cross it sometimes figures of an arresting appeal and human voices of divine imagination.

61. Jane Austen. Pride and Prejudice.

Jane Austen's delicate and ironic art will remain unassailable through all changes of taste and varieties of opinion. What she really possesses — what might be called the clue to her inimitable secret — is nothing less than the power of giving expression to that undying ironic detachment, touched with a fine malice but full of tender understanding, which

all women, to some degree or other, share, and which all men, to some degree or other, suffer from; in other words, the terrible and beautiful insight of the maternal instinct. The clear charm of her unequalled style — a style quite classical in its economy of material and its dignified reserve — is a charm frequently caught in the wit and fine malice of one's unmarried aunts; but it is, none the less, the very epitome of maternal humor. As a creative realist, giving to her characters the very body and pressure of actual life, no writer, living or dead, has surpassed her. Without romance, without philosophy, without social theories, without pathological curiosity, without the remotest interest in "Nature," she has yet managed to achieve a triumphant artistic success; and to leave an impression of serene wisdom such as no other woman writer has equaled or approached.

62. Emily Brontë. Wuthering Heights.

Of all the books of all the Brontës, this one is the supreme masterpiece. Charlotte has genius and imagination. She has passion too. But there is a certain demonic violence about Emily which carries her work into a region of high and desperate beauty forbidden to the gentler spirit of her sister. The love of Heathcliff and Catherine breaks the bonds of ordinary sensual or sentimental relationship and hurls itself into that darker, stranger, more unearthly air, wherein one hears the voices of the great lovers; and where Sappho and Michaelangelo and Swift and Shelley and Nietzsche gasp forth their imprecations and their terrible ecstasies.

Crude and rough and jagged and pitiless, the style of this astounding book seems to rend and tear, like a broken saw, at the very roots of existence. In some curious way, as in Balzac and Dostoievsky, emotions and situations which have the tone and mood of quite gross melodrama are so driven inwards by sheer diabolical intensity, that they touch the granite substratum of what is eternal in human passion. The smell of rain-drenched moors, the crying of the wind in the Scotch firs, the long lines of black rooks drifting across the twilight,— these things become, in the savage style of this extraordinary girl, the very symbols and tokens of the power that rends her spirit.

63. George Meredith. Harry Richmond.

" Harry Richmond " is at once the least Meredithian and the best of all Meredith's books. Meredith, though to a much less degree than George Eliot, is one of those pseudo-philosophic, pseudo-ethical writers, who influence a generation or two and then seem to become antiquated and faded.

It is when he is least philosophical and least moralistic — as in the superbly imaginative figure of Richmond Roy — that he is at his greatest. There is, throughout his work, an unpleasing strain, like the vibration of a rope drawn out too tight,— a strain and a tug of intellectual intensity, that is not fulfilled by any corresponding intellectual wisdom. His descriptions of nature, in his poems, as well as in his prose works, have an original vigor and a pungent tang of their own; but the twisted violence of their introduction, full of queer jolts and jerks,

prevents their impressing one with any sense of calm or finality. They are too aphoristic, these passages. They are too clever. They smell too much of the lamp. The same fault may be remarked in the rounding off of the Meredithian plots where one is so seldom conscious of the presence of the "inevitable" and so teased by the "obstinate questionings" of purely mental problems.

Reading Henry James one feels like a wisp of straw floating down a wide smooth river; reading Meredith one is flicked and flapped and beaten, as if beneath a hand with a flail.

64. **Henry James. The Ambassadors. The Tragic Muse. The Soft Side. The Better Sort. The Wings of the Dove. The Golden Bowl.**

Henry James is the most purely "artistic" as he is the most profoundly "intellectual" of all the European writers of our age. His fame will steadily grow, and his extraordinary genius will more and more create that finer taste by which alone he can be appreciated.

No novelist who has ever lived has "taken art" so seriously. But it is art, and not life, he takes seriously; and, therefore, along with his methods of elaborate patience, one is conscious of a most delicate and whimsical playfulness — sparing literally nothing. In spite of his beautiful cosmopolitanism it must never be forgotten that at bottom Henry James is richly and wonderfully American. That tender and gracious "penchant" of his for pure-souled and modest-minded young men, for their

high resolves, their noble renunciations, their touching faith, is an indication of how much he has exploited — in the completest æsthetic sense — the naïve puritanism of his great nation.

In regard to his style one may remark three main divergent epochs; the first closing with the opening of the "nineties," and the third beginning about the year 1903. Of these the second seems to the present compiler the best; being, indeed, more intellectualized and subtle than the first and less mannered and obscure than the final one. The finest works he produced would thus be found to be those on one side or the other of the year 1900.

The subtlety of Henry James is a subtlety which is caused not by philosophical but by psychological distinctions and it is a subtlety which enlarges our sympathy for the average human nature of middle class people to a degree that must, in the very deepest sense of the word, be called moral.

The wisdom to be derived from him is all of a piece with the pleasure — both being the result of a fuller, richer, and more discriminating consciousness of the tragic complexity of quite little and unimportant characters. To a real lover of Henry James the greyest and least promising aspects of ordinary life seem to hold up to us infinite possibilities of delicate excitement. It is indeed out of excitement — partly intellectual and partly æsthetic, — that his great effects are produced. And yet the final effect is always one of resignation and calm — as with all the supreme masters.

70. Thomas Hardy. **Tess of the D'Urbevilles. The Return of the Native. The Mayor of Casterbridge. Far from the Madding Crowd. Wessex Poems.**

Thomas Hardy remains the greatest poet and novelist of the England of our age. His poetry, Wessex Poems, Poems of Past and Present, Time's Laughing-Stock, Satires of Circumstance, make up the most powerful and original contribution to modern verse, produced recently, either in England or America. Not to value Hardy's poetry as highly as all but his very greatest prose is to betray oneself as having missed the full pregnancy of his bitter and lovely wisdom.

He has, like Henry James, three "manners" or styles — the first containing such lighter, friendlier work, as "Life's Little Ironies," "Under a Greenwood Tree," and "The Trumpet Major" — the second being the period of the great tragedies which assume the place, in his work, of "Hamlet," "Lear," "Macbeth" and "Othello," in the work of Shakespeare — the third, of curious and imaginative interest, expresses in quite a particular way, Mr. Hardy's own peculiar point of view. The Well-Beloved, Jude the Obscure, and the later poems would belong to this epoch.

At his best Hardy is a novelist second to none. His style has a grandeur, a distinction, a concentration, which we find neither in Balzac nor Dostoievsky. Not to appreciate the power and beauty of his manner, when his real inspiration holds him, is to confess that the genuinely classical in style and the

genuinely pagan in feeling has no meaning for you. No English writer, whether in prose or poetry, has ever caught so completely the magic of the earth and the quaint humors, tragical and laughable, of those who live inured to her moods; who live with her moroseness, her whimsicality, her vindictiveness, her austerity, her evasive grace.

Mr. Hardy's clairvoyant feeling for Nature is, however, only the background of his work. He is no idyllic posture-monger. The march of events as they drive forward the primitive earth-born men and women of Wessex, thrills one with the same weight of accumulated fatality, as — the comparison is tedious and pedantic — the fortunes of the ill-starred houses of Argos and Thebes. One peculiarity of Mr. Hardy's method must finally be mentioned, as giving their most characteristic quality to these formidable scenes — I mean his preference for form over color. Who can forget those desolately emphatic human protagonists silhouetted so austerely along the tops of hills and against the perspectives of long white roads?

75. **Joseph Conrad. Chance. Lord Jim. Victory. Youth. Almayer's Folly.** *Published by Doubleday Page & Co. with a critical monograph, so admirably written (it is given gratis) by Wilson Follet that one longs to see more criticism from such an accomplished hand.*

Conrad's work — and, considering his foreign origin and his late choice of English as a medium of expression, it is no less than an astounding achievement — is work of the very highest literary and

psychological value. It is, indeed, as Mr. Follet says, only such criticism as is passionately anxious to prove for itself the true "romance of the intellect" that can hope to deal adequately with such an output. The background of Conrad's books is primarily the sea itself; and after the sea, ships. No one has indicated the extraordinary romance of ships in the way he has done — of ships in the open sea, in the harbour, at the wharf, or driven far up some perilous tropical river.

But it is neither the sea nor the tropical recesses nor the sun-scorched river-edges of his backgrounds that make up the essence of romance in the Conrad books. This is found in nothing less than the mysterious potencies for courage and for fear, for good and for evil, of human beings themselves — of human beings isolated by some external "diablerie" which throws every feature of them into terrible and baffling relief.

The finest and deepest effects of Conrad's art are always found when, in the process of the story, some solitary man and woman encounter each other, far from civilization, and tearing off, as it were, the mask of one another's souls, are confronted by a deeper and more inveterate mystery — the eternal mystery of difference, which separates all men born into the world and keeps us perpetually alone. In the case of Heyst and Lena — of Flora de Barral and her Captain Anthony — of Charles and Mrs. Gould — of Aissa and Willems — of Almayer's daughter and her Malay lover, Mr. Conrad takes up the ancient planetary theme of the loves of men and

women and throws upon it a sudden, original, and singularly stimulating light; a light, that like a lantern carried down into the very Cave of the "Mothers," throws its flickering and ambiguous rays over the large, dumb, formless shapes — the primordial motives of human hearts — which grope and fumble in that thick darkness.

The style of Conrad, simpler than that of James, less monumental than that of Hardy, has nevertheless a certain forward-driving impetus hardly less effective than these more famous mediums of expression. "Lord Jim" is perhaps his masterpiece and may be regarded as the most interesting book written recently in our language with the exception of Henry James' "Golden Bowl." For sheer excitement and the thrilling sensation of delayed dénouement it must be conceded that not one of our classical novelists can touch Conrad. "Victory" remains an absorbing evidence of his power of concentrating at one and the same moment our dramatic and our psychological interest.

80. Walter Pater. Marius the Epicurean. Studies in the Renaissance. Imaginary Portraits. Plato and Platonism. Gaston de Latour.

Walter Pater's writings are more capable than any in our list of offering, if approached at the suitable hour and moment, new vistas and possibilities both intellectual and emotional. That wise and massive egoism taught by Goethe, that impassioned "living to oneself" indicated by Stendhal, find in Walter Pater a new qualification and a new sanction.

Himself a supreme master of the rare and exquisite

in style, he becomes, for those who really understand him, something more penetrating and insidious than a mere personality. He becomes an atmosphere, an attitude, a tone, a temper — and one too which may serve us to most rich and recondite purpose, as we wander through the world seeking the excitement and consecration of impassioned cults and organized discriminations.

For this austere and elaborately constructed style of his is nothing less than the palpable expression of his own discriminating days; the wayfaring, so self-consciously and scrupulously guarded, of his own fastidious "hedonism," seeking its elaborate satisfactions among the chance-offered occasions of hour, or person or of place.

Walter Pater remains, for those who are permitted to feel these things, the one who above all others has the subtlest and most stimulating method of approach with regard to all the great arts, and most especially with regard to the art of literature.

No one, after reading him, can remain gross, academic, vulgar, or indiscriminate. And, with the rest, we seem to be aware of a secret attitude not only towards art but towards life also, to miss the key to which would be to fail in that architecture of the soul and senses which is the object of the discipline not merely of the æsthetic but of the religious cult.

For the supreme initiation into which we are led by these elaborate and patient essays, is the initiation into the world of inner austerity, which makes

its clear-cut and passionate distinctions in our emotional as well as in our intellectual life.

Everything, without exception, as we read Pater becomes "a matter of taste"; but the high and exclusive nature of this taste, to which no sensations but those which are vulgar and common are forbidden, is itself a guarantee of the gentleness and delicacy of the passions evoked. His ultimate philosophy seems to be that — as he himself has described it in "Marius,"— of Aristippus of Cyrene; but this "undermining of metaphysic by means of metaphysic" lands him in no mere arid agnosticism or weary emptiness of suspended judgment; but in a rich and imaginative region of infinite possibilities, from the shores of which he is able to launch forth at will; or to gather up at his pleasure the delicate shells strewn upon the sand.

85. George Bernard Shaw. Man and Superman.

Mr. Shaw has found his rôle and his occupation very happily cut out for him in the unfailing stupidity, not untouched by a sense of humor, of our Anglo-Saxon democracy in England and America. In Germany, too, there seems naïveté and simplicity enough to be still entertained by these mischievously whimsical and yet portentously moral comedies. It appears however that the civilization for which Rabelais and Voltaire wrote, is less willing to acclaim as an extraordinary genius one who has the wit to pierce with a bodkin the idolatries and illusions of such pathetically simple people.

Bernard Shaw takes the Universe very seriously. By calling it the Life-Force he permits himself to

address it in that heroic vein reserved, among more ordinary intelligencies, for anthropomorphic deities. Bernard Shaw's sense of the comic draws its spirit from the contrast between clever people and stupid people, and seems to appear at its best when engaged in upsetting the pseudo-historical, pseudo-philosophical illusions of Anglo-Saxons, in charmingly ridiculous pantomimes, which the redeeming humor of that patient race has just intelligence enough thoroughly to enjoy.

If he were himself less moralistically earnest the spice of the jest would disappear. His humor is not universal humor. It is topical humor; and topical humor derives its point from moral contrast, — the contrast in this case between the virtue of Mr. Shaw and the vices of modern society.

" Man and Superman " is undoubtedly his most interesting work from a philosophical point of view, but his later plays — such bewitching farces as " Fanny's First Play," " Androcles," and " Pygmalion "— seem to express more completely than anything else that rollicking combative roguishness which is his most characteristic quality.

86. Gilbert K. Chesterton. Orthodoxy.

Mr. Chesterton may congratulate himself upon being the only man of letters in England who has had the originality or the insight or the temperamental courage to adopt a definitely reactionary philosophy; whereas in France we have Huysmans, Barrés, Bourget, Bordeaux, and many others, whose persuasive and romantic rôle it is to prop up tottering altars; in England we have only Mr. Chesterton.

That is doubtless why it is necessary for him to exaggerate his paradoxes so extravagantly; and also why he is so important and so dear to the hearts of intelligent clergymen.

Mr. Chesterton's grand philosophical "coup" is a simple and effective one — the turning of everything, complacently and hilariously, upside down. One has the salutary amusement in reading him of visualizing the Universe in the posture of a Gargantuan baby, "prepared" for a sound smacking. Mr. Chesterton himself is the chief actor in this performance and wonderful pyrotechnic stars leap into space as its happy result.

Mr. Chesterton has his own peculiar "religion"— a sort of Chelsea Embankment Catholicism, in which, in place of Pontifical Encyclicals, we have Punch and Judy jokes, and in place of Apostolic Doctrine we have umbrellas, lamp-posts, electric-signs and prestidigitating clerics.

Mr. Chesterton is never more entertaining, never more entirely at ease, than when turning one or other of the really noble and tragic figures of human intellect into preposterous "Aunt Sallies" at whose battered heads he can fling the turnips and potatoes of the Average Man's average suspicion, dipped for that purpose in a fiery sort of brandy of his own whimsical wit. If we don't become "like little children"; in other words like jovial, middle-aged swashbucklers, and protest our belief in Flying Pigs, Pusses in Boots, Jacks on the top of Beanstalks, Old Women who live in Shoes, Fairies, Fandangos, Prester Johns, and Blue

Devils, there is no hope for us and we are condemned to a dreadful purgatory of pedantic and atheistic dullness, along with Li Hung Chang, George Eliot, Herbert Spencer and other heretics whose view of the Dogma of the Immortality of the Soul differs from that of Mr. Chesterton.

87. Oscar Wilde. Intentions. The Importance of Being Earnest. De Profundis.

"Intentions" is perhaps the most original of all Wilde's remarkable works.

His supreme art, as he himself well knew, was, after all, the art of conversation. One might even put it that his greatest achievement in life was just the achievement of being brazenly and shamelessly what he naturally was — especially in conversation. To call him a "poseur" with the implication that he pretended or assumed a manner, were just as absurd as to call a tiger striped with the implication that the beast deliberately "put on" that mark of distinction.

If it is a pose to enjoy the sensation of one's own spontaneous gestures, Wilde was indeed the worst of pretenders. But the stupid gravity of many generals, judges and archbishops is not more natural to them than his exquisite insolence was to him.

Below the wit and provocative persiflage of "Intentions" there is a deep and true conception of the nature of art — a conception which might well serve as the "philosophy" of much of the most interesting and arresting of modern work.

Wilde's extraordinary charm largely depends upon something invincibly boyish and youthful in him.

His personality, as he himself says, has become almost symbolic — symbolic, that is, of a certain shameless and beautiful defiance of the world, expressed in an unconquerable insolence worthy of the very spirit of hard, brave, flagrant youth.

"The Importance of Being Earnest" is perhaps the gayest, least responsible, and most adorably witty of all English comedies; just as "Salome" is the most richly colored and smoulderingly sensual of all modern tragedies. One actually touches with one's fingers the feasting-cups of the Tetrarch; and the passion of the daughter of Herodias hangs round one like an exotic perfume.

In "De Profundis" we sound the sea-floor of a quite open secret; the secret namely of the invincible attraction of a certain type of artist and sensualist towards the "white Christ" who came forth from the tomb where he had been laid, with precious ointments about him, by the Arimathæan.

In "The Soul of Man" another symbolic reversion displays itself — that reversion namely of the soul of the true artist towards the revolutionary organization which, along with insensitiveness and brutality, proposes to abolish ugliness also.

The name of Oscar Wilde thus becomes a name "to conjure with" and a fantastic beacon-fire to which those "oppressed and humiliated" may repair and take new heart.

90. Rudyard Kipling. The Jungle Book.

Whatever one may feel about Mr. Kipling's other work, about his rampagious imperialism, his self-conscious swashbucklerism, his pipe-clay and his

journalism, his moralistic breeziness and his patronage of the "white man's burden," one cannot help admitting that the Jungle-Book is one of the immortal children's tales of the world.

In spite of the somewhat priggish introduction, even here, of what might be called his Anglo-Saxon propaganda, the Jungle-Book carries one further, it almost seems, and more convincingly, into the very heart and inwards of beast-life and wood-magic, than any other work ever written. The figures of these animals are quite Biblical in their emphatic picturesqueness, and never has the romance of these spotted and striped aboriginals, in their primordial struggles for food and water, been more thrillingly conveyed. Every scene, every situation, brands itself upon the memory as perhaps nothing else in literature does except the stories in the Old Testament. The best of all children's books—"Grimm's Fairy Tales" itself—takes no deeper hold upon the youthful mind. Mr. Kipling's genius which in his other work is constantly "dropping bricks" as the expressive phrase has it, and running amuck through strenuous banalities, rises in the Jungle-Book to heights of poetic and imaginative suggestion which will give him an undying position among the great writers of our race.

91. **Charles L. Dodgson. Alice in Wonderland.** *The edition with the original illustrations.*

It would be ridiculous to compile a list of a hundred best books and leave out this one. Lack of space alone prevents us from including "Through the Looking Glass" too.

"Alice" is after all as much of a classic now and

by the same right, the right of a universal appeal, to every type of child, as Mother Goose of the Nursery Rhymes. She had only to appear — this slender-legged, straight-haired, Early-Victorian little prude, to enter at once the inmost arcana of the temple of art. The book is a singular evidence of what the power of a desperate devotion can do — a devotion like this of Mr. Dodgson to all little girls — when a certain whimsical genius belongs to the possessed by it.

The creator of Alice has really done nothing but permit his absorbing worship of many demure little maids to focus and concentrate itself into an almost incredible transformation of what was the intrinsic nature of the writer into what was the intrinsic nature of the "written-about."

The author of this book has indeed, so to speak, eluded the limitations of his own skin, and by the magic of his love for little girls has passed — carrying his grown-up cleverness with him — actually into the little girl's inmost consciousness. The book might be quite as witty as it is and quite as amusing but it would not carry for us that peculiar "perfume in the mention," that provocative enchantment, if it were not much more — Oh, so much more — than merely amusing. The thousand and one reactions, impressions, intimations, of a little girl's consciousness, are reproduced here with a faithfulness that is absolutely startling. What really makes the transformation complete is the absence in "Alice" of that half-comic sententious priggishness which, as soon as we have ceased to be children, we

find so curiously irritating in Kingsley's "Water Babies."

92. **John Galsworthy. The Country House. The Man of Property. Fraternity.**

John Galsworthy is almost alone among modern writers in the possession of a genius, which in the most exact sense of that admirable word, can only be described as the genius of a gentleman. It is a style singularly sensitive, a little vibrant perhaps sometimes, and so tense as to become attenuated, but of a most rare and wistful beauty. His humor which is his weakest point is a thing of almost feminine perceptions but quaintly pliable, as the sense of humor in women often is, to an odd strain of peevish extravagance.

The chivalrous nobility of Mr. Galsworthy's habitual mood is at once the cause of certain fragilities and betrayals in the mass and weight of his art and the cause of the indignant pity which evokes some of his finest touches.

It seems to irritate his nerves almost to frenzy to contemplate the shackles and fetters with which, whether in the domestic or social or legal world, the free spirits of men and women are bound down and imprisoned.

The touching figure of Mrs. Pendyce in the "Country House"— the tragic figure of Irene Soames Forsyte in the "Man of Property"— the pitiful figure of the little Model in "Fraternity"— have all something of the same quality.

95. **W. Somerset Maugham. Of Human Bondage.**

In this remarkable book Mr. W. Somerset Maugham

surpasses by a long distance the average novels of recent appearance. The portion of the book which deals with Paris, especially with that mad poet there, who expounds the philosophy of the "Pattern," is as suggestive a piece of literature as any we have seen for half a dozen years.

The passage towards the end of the book on the subject of the genius of El Greco is also profoundly interesting; and the sentences which comment so gravely and beautifully upon the cry of the Christ, "Father, forgive them; they know not what they do," have a rare and most moving power.

96. Gilbert Cannan. Round the Corner.

"Round the Corner" is perhaps Mr. Cannan's best book but "Young Earnest" and "Old Mole" are also curious and interesting volumes.

Mr. Cannan is as typical a modern writer as could be found anywhere. And yet modernity is not his only charm. He has genuine psychological insight and though this insight comes in flashes and is not continuous it often gives an original twist to his characters which helps to make them strangely convincing and appealing. "Round the Corner" is a genuine masterpiece. It is the history of the most charming and touching clergyman described in all English fiction since the Vicar of Wakefield; and the massive, solid manner in which the story is constructed, the vigor and reality of the interplay of the various members of Francis' family, the admirable portrait of the mother, the grand and solemn close of the book, make it one of the most powerful works of fiction England has produced during the last decade.

Now and again — and what praise could go further? — there are little touches of clear-cut realism, of that kind which has a mystical background, which actually suggest some of the lighter and more idyllic work of Goethe himself. The book has genuine wisdom in it, of a sort superior to any philosophical system, and one feels at the close the tonic and soothing effect of a powerful moral influence, sweetening and refining one's general reaction towards life.

97. **Vincent O'Sullivan. The Good Girl.** *Published by Dutton & Co.*

This admirable work of art is not known as well as it deserves either in England or America. It is a work of genius in every sense of that word, and it produces on the mind that curious sense of completeness and finality which only such works produce.

Mr. L. U. Wilkinson — himself a writer of powerful achievement — says of "The Good Girl": "It does what I have always desired should be done; it reduces 'atmosphere' and 'nature' to their proper subordinate place. It wastes no energy. It focusses one's intellect and one's emotion. It creates characters who resemble none others in fiction. It is imaginative realism of the highest level of excellence."

The complex figure of Vendred, the hero of the story, the evasive provocative Mona Lisa-like portrait of Mrs. Dover, the extraordinary and stimulating art with which her husband is described, the agitating and tragic appeal made to us by Vendred's

child-wife, the unfortunate Louise — all these together make up one of the most absorbing and unforgettable impressions we have received for many years.

Of Mr. and Mrs. Dover in their relation to one another the following passage reverberates through one's mind: —"They would sit opposite one another silently, criticising with a drastic pitiless criticism. This in itself showed where they had arrived; for faith has to be shaken before there is room for criticism, and if love survives the criticism of lovers, it is altogether different from the love they began with. Lovers can be almost anything they choose to each other and still be in love, but they cannot be critical. That is blighting."

Perhaps the most tragic thing in the book is the letter written by Louise to Vendred when the luckless child discovers her husband's intrigue with her mother: —"I came to you in the middle of the night last night because I was afraid of the wind. The fire was burning and I saw. I am gone, you will never see me again."

The last scenes of the unfortunate girl's life — indirectly described by the ruffian who got possession of her in Paris — produce on the mind that sickening sense of the wanton stupidity of the Universe which fills one with hopeless pity.

The author of this book must have a noble and formidable soul.

98. Oliver Onions. The Story of Louie.

"The Story of Louie" is the last and finest volume of an astonishing trilogy — the first two volumes of

which are named respectively "In Accordance with the Evidence" and "The Debit Account."

The mere fact that in the midst of our contemptible hatred of "long books" this excellent trilogy should have appeared, is an indication of the daring and originality of Mr. Oliver Onions.

Mr. Onions is one of the few modern writers — along with Hardy, Conrad and James — who is entirely untouched by political or ethical propagandism. His trilogy is a genuinely creative work of a high and exclusive order. The manner in which, to quote Mr. L. U. Wilkinson again —"the whole prospect is, as it were, strained through the character of one or other of the leading persons is in itself a proof of this writer's fine artistic instinct." The way in which all the leading persons in the book stand out in clear relief and indelibly print themselves on the mind is evidence of the value of this method. And what masterly irony in the contrast between "Evie" for instance as Jeffries sees her and "Evie" as she is seen by her rival Louie!

Nowhere in literature, except in Dostoievsky, has the ferocious struggle of two women over a man been so savagely and truly portrayed as in the great scene in "Louie" between that young woman and Evie when the latter visits her in her rooms.

Oliver Onions' humor has that large and vigorous expansiveness, touched with something almost sardonic, which we associate with some of the very greatest writers. There is always present in his work a certain free sweep of imagination which

deals masterfully and suggestively with all manner of sordid material.

99. **Arnold Bennett. Clayhanger.**

"Clayhanger" with its sequels, "Hilda Lessways" and "These Twain," makes up an imposing and convincing trilogy of middle-class life in the English Pottery Towns. To these books should be added "Old Wives' Tale," "Anna of the Five Towns" and all the others among this writer's works which deal with these Pottery places he knows so superbly well.

Outside the Five Towns Mr. Bennett loses something of the power of his touch. He is an interesting example of a writer with a definite "milieu" out of whose happy security he is always ill-advised to stray.

But within his own region he is a powerful master. No one in modern English fiction has treated so creatively and illuminatingly the least interesting and least romantic strata of human society which is perhaps to be found in the whole world.

And yet he endows this paralyzing bourgeoisie with astonishing life. One turns back from much more exciting literature to these ignorant, conceited, restricted and undistinguished people.

One turns back to them because Mr. Bennett shows one the tragic humanity, eternally and mysteriously fascinating, to be found beneath these vulgar and unlovely exteriors. Nor when it comes to the problem of sex itself is this writer less of a master. Never has the undying conflict, the world-old struggle, between those who, in the Catullian phrase,

"love and hate" at the same time, been more convincingly brought into the light than in the relations between these uninteresting but strangely appealing people.

Arnold Bennett's knowledge of the Five Towns gives to his work a background of significant congruity whose interaction upon the characters of his plots has the same kind of weight and portentousness as the interaction of Nature in the books of Mr. Hardy.

Such a background may be in itself materialistic and sordid, but in the imaginative reaction it produces upon the characters it has the genuine poetic quality.

100. **Oxford Book of English Verse.**

This is by far the best anthology of English poetry, its only rival being the first series of Palgrave's Golden Treasury. Those interested in the work of more recent poets and in the latest poetic "movements" in England and America would be wise to turn to Putnam's "Georgian Poetry"—two series —and "The New Poetry" by Harriet Monroe, published by Macmillan. The compiler of this selection of books feels himself that the most poetical among the younger poets of our age is Walter de la Mare and of the poems which Mr. De la Mare has so far written, he finds the best to be those extraordinary and magical verses entitled "The Listeners" which seem to come nearer to giving a voice to the unutterable margin of our days than any others written within the last ten years.

Sir Walter Scott.
Thackeray

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